



Celebrating the May 23 ribbon cutting of Georgetown Solar in Polk County are L-R: John Ukura, Polk-Burnett board director; Anna Ringstad, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin's NW Wisconsin Regional Rep.; Wisconsin Rep. Gae Magnafici; Beth Esser, OneEnergy Renewables; Heather Gerber, Steve Stroshane, Joan O'Fallon and Jarod Boerst, Polk-Burnett Electric Cooperative; Mike Morris and Joe Metro, Polk-Burnett board directors.



Georgetown Solar dedicated May 23, energy benefits local co-op members

by General Manager Steve Stroshane

On a blue-sky day in May, I was joined by friends of the co-op to dedicate Georgetown Solar, our newest solar array to benefit local co-op members.

Most important in our decision to execute this project: Georgetown Solar benefits the members of Polk-Burnett Electric Cooperative by generating power locally. It not only adds clean energy to the grid, but it also provides financial and operational benefits. Operationally, it helps us relieve high summer demand at nearby Bunyan Substation. Financially, it helps us become less reliant on the energy market and provides a stable power cost for the next 25 years. Georgetown Solar fulfills our mission of providing safe, reliable electricity for our members.

Georgetown Solar is located just northeast of Balsam Lake in the Town of Georgetown, Polk County. This site near the intersection of County Roads I and H was selected because it's close to Bunyan Substation, where solar energy will feed into the electric distribution system and help supply that area's growing demand for electricity.

Last summer, we saw the energy load at Bunyan Sub spike over the Fourth of July weekend, as seasonal homes filled with family and friends, and air conditioners ran nonstop to cool us down over the hot holiday weekend. Georgetown Solar will take some of the pressure off substation equipment, especially during the summertime when it's needed most.

The 2 MW array generates 4.3 million kWh of electricity annually, enough to power about 430 homes. The array sits on 12 acres and has 4,472 panels that operate on a tracking system to follow the path of the sun for maximum power generation. It was officially energized December 28, 2023, and we celebrated with a ribbon cutting May 23, 2024.

Polk-Burnett partnered with OneEnergy Renewables to develop Georgetown Solar. The Madison-based company has expertise in site development, engineering, equipment purchasing, construction and operations. The timing of Georgetown Solar construction was coordinated with other co-op solar projects across Wisconsin to get a better price and return on investment for members.

"We're proud to participate on this project with Polk-Burnett," said Beth Esser of OneEnergy Renewables at the ribbon cutting. "Developing local solar requires collaboration among trusted partners. I'd like to thank co-op, county and municipal leaders, as well as our landowners. Georgetown Solar demonstrates your commitment to the community and our natural resources for years to come."



Co-op solar arrays are dual-purpose spaces that provide energy for members, as well as acres of important ecosystems. The ground under the array is being restored with pasture, prairie grasses and wildflowers, providing habitat for pollinators and healthy root systems to prevent soil erosion from wind and rain.

*Georgetown Solar is the second utility scale solar array in Polk-Burnett's service territory. The first, **SunTuria Solar**, was dedicated in 2017 behind the co-op office in Centuria. The 1.25 MW system generates power for about 200 homes. It is owned and operated by ENGIE North America, and the co-op purchases the solar energy output. School and community groups are invited for tours. You can see energy output and learn more about Georgetown and SunTuria Solar on polkburnett.com.*

Interested in solar energy for your home?

We're seeing a growing interest in residential solar, and we encourage co-op members to work with us before starting your project. Currently, 189 member-owned solar arrays are connected to Polk-Burnett's electric distribution system. Below are points to help you consider if solar is right for you:

- ✿ Make energy efficiency a first priority. Basic home energy upgrades, such as sealing air leaks and insulation, have a better return on investment and should be done prior to solar installation.
- ✿ Make sure you work with a reputable contractor.
- ✿ Consider long-term maintenance.
- ✿ Understand how solar connects to the electric grid for safety and reliability.

Most solar systems are designed to generate a portion of the electricity you need, but won't provide 100%. At night and on cloudy days, and at other high-energy-use times, you'll need more than your system can produce. That means you'll still be connected to your co-op's power lines, with energy flowing both ways. Knowing your energy use will help determine what size system to install.

Members, receive an EnergySense rebate up to \$600 for qualifying solar system; tax credits also available. Evergreen renewable blocks are also available for members who want to support renewables without owning panels or turbines.

Propane prebuy contracts available late July, due August 23

- Prebuy contracts lock in a price on a fixed number of gallons.
- Minimum prebuy purchase is 300 gallons with payment due August 23.
- If contracting isn't an option, sign up for our budget plan by August 23.

Online accounts are available to view past deliveries, account balance and make payments. Sign up on polkburnett.com; look for Propane Center. **800-421-0283, ext. 378 or 411.**





Get to know Board Director Jerry Okonek

Jerry Okonek, Spooner, is our director from co-op district 7 and has served on the Polk-Burnett board since 2018. He was re-elected in spring 2024 for a third term.

When Jerry was appointed to the board six years ago, he said it was an easy fit. "There is a lot to learn in the energy industry, but board directors discuss each issue thoroughly, and we come to an agreement that everyone can support because it's good for the members."

Most challenging, he said, is "long-term forecasting for future generations. What will energy look like in 10 or 20 years? What will the co-op look like? We may not know the answers today, but I can tell you that there are bright people in our industry and at the co-op working on these questions. At Polk-Burnett, we have a strategic plan and a member-focused mission that guide our decisions."

From his early years, Jerry set his sights on the future. As a student at Spooner High School, his dream was to work in construction. Today, he is a general contractor and has owned OK Construction for 44 years. Most of his work is residential, but his company also does small commercial work. He noted that our area needs starter homes and rentals.

Jerry shares his experience, skills and passion with youth as a member of advisory boards at Northwood Technical College and Webster High School's Tiger Tech education program.

He also served on the Scott Fire Department for 33 years, 24 as chief. Jerry and his wife Linda are long-time residents of the area, raising three children here and now enjoying their three grandchildren.

He said he appreciates the community support for the co-op and his recent re-election to the board. "Thank you for your confidence in me as your board director. If you have questions, I'm here to help."

Polk-Burnett Electric Cooperative holds board elections each spring. In 2024, co-op districts 7, 8 and 9 were on the ballot, with three directors running unopposed. The co-op board represents members in setting policies and rates, and approving the budget and investments in the power grid. Learn more about your co-op board of directors on polkburnett.com.

Why it's good to see co-op workers on your property

Polk-Burnett employees and contractors work throughout our service territory, in the rights-of-way and easements, and across your private property and driveways. We're working to ensure reliable power for you and your neighbors, and that means we must cross your property from time to time. You may see us:

- ✦ Making routine repairs
- ✦ Replacing meters
- ✦ Trimming trees and brush
- ✦ Restoring power outages
- ✦ Locating buried utilities for construction and digging projects
- ✦ Working to upgrade poles, wires, transformers and equipment
- ✦ Inspecting lines, power poles, transformer boxes and equipment



All field work, except emergency power restoration, is conducted during normal working hours, 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Every effort is made to avoid damage and unnecessary intrusion. If you have concerns about our work, contact us at 800-421-0283. We appreciate your cooperation.

Be prepared for summer storms and power outages



We work hard to prevent outages, but summer storms are always a threat.

If your power goes out:

- ✦ Check circuit breakers, fuses and the neighbors.
- ✦ Report outages 24/7 on SmartHub or 800-421-0283.
- ✦ View Outage Map on polkburnett.com and see Facebook for major outages.
- ✦ Keep away from fallen power lines, and trees and branches on lines. Report these hazards.

If we have your cell number on file, we'll send you a text alert with outage information, including cause and estimated restoration time when possible.

Our goal is to restore your power quickly and safely, while keeping you informed.

Keep your upstairs cool

If your home has a second story, nobody has to prove to you that heat rises; you already know that. For many, the answer to keeping your upstairs cool is to crank up the air conditioning, but that typically just turns your living room into an ice box. The real key to upstairs comfort is limiting heat gain and circulating the air.

Ceiling fans make upstairs rooms feel cooler by circulating the air and providing a cooling sensation on your skin. Just be sure to turn them off when you leave to avoid wasting energy.

Invest in thermal blocking drapes and close them whenever there is direct sunlight. This will limit heat gain, keeping your house cooler.

Because we're so used to air conditioning, it's easy to forget that sometimes it's actually cooler outside. On cool nights, open your windows and let that air in. If it's still too warm upstairs, hire a qualified professional to check your attic for air leaks and ensure that it's properly insulated.

STAY COOL



Give us a call or visit our website for more ways to improve energy efficiency, lower energy costs and improve comfort in your home.

Do The
SUMMER SHIFT

REDUCE ELECTRICITY WHEN DEMAND AND PRICE ARE HIGH SUMMER WEEKDAYS, 1 - 6 PM

Shut off lights and electronics.
Wash dishes & laundry before or after peak times.
Turn thermostat up a few degrees.
Close blinds & cook outdoors to keep house cool.
Sign up to receive peak alerts by phone, text or email.

IF YOU RECEIVE AN EMAIL SURVEY, WE APPRECIATE YOUR FEEDBACK TO HELP US IMPROVE.

All members who submit a survey will be entered in a drawing for a \$50 bill credit.

Polk-Burnett is your local Touchstone Energy Cooperative. Reliable power with efficiency and extraordinary service.

Follow us on Facebook. Sign up for our SmartHub app.

800-421-0283 • polkburnett.com



Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer | Member Owned | Community Focused

